

## Three Incongruent Documents

### Commission on K to 12 Education

In January of 2019, the Government of Manitoba appointed a team of commissioners to review the K-12 public education system. The report of the Commission was released on Monday, March 15. Titled, ***Our Children's Success: Manitoba's Future***, the 180-page report outlines 75 recommendations with 10 imperatives for action:

1. Strengthen Educator Capacity to Improve Teaching and Learning
2. Increase School Leadership Effectiveness
3. Improve Student Engagement and Well-being
4. Close the Achievement Gap Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Students
5. Commit to Equitable Outcomes and Improved Achievement for All
6. Ensure Quality Educational Programming in Rural, Remote, and Northern Communities
7. Strengthen the Delivery of French Language Education
8. Expand Community Education and Strengthen Public Outreach and Alliances
9. Improve Foundational Skills in Mathematics, Literacy, and Other Curricular Areas
10. Enhance the Effectiveness of Governance, Administrative, and Funding Structures

There are many valid recommendations in this document that the government has chosen to ignore. Rather, they've cherry-picked recommendations that distort the Commission's intent into a regressive and deeply troublesome vision for the future. The 'future' is outlined in their document, ***Better Education Starts Today: Putting Students First***.

### Better Education Starts Today: Putting Students First

The Manitoba government almost simultaneously released the document, ***Better Education Starts Today: Putting Students First (BEST)*** which outlines the four pillars of their education reform strategy informed by the recommendations of the Commission. Each pillar includes broad goals and priority actions, but noticeably missing from the 34-page document are any details on operationalization and timelines.

1. Governance and Accountability for Results
2. High-Quality Learning and Outcomes
3. Future-Ready Students
4. Excellence in Teaching and Leadership

### Bill 64: The Education Modernization Act

**Bill 64 - The Education Modernization Act** - is enabling legislation that will be used to achieve some of the government recommendations included in the K-12 Education Review. Once it receives royal assent, Bill 64 will replace *The Public Schools Act*, *The Education Administration Act* and *The Community Schools Act*, the pieces of legislation that currently govern education in Manitoba.

Among other things, Bill 64 proposes the *elimination of democratically elected school boards*, the *creation of a provincial education authority*, *school division amalgamations* reducing the 38 divisions to 15 "regional catchment areas" - with roughly half the province's

students in one region and the other half across the other 14 - and *limiting principals and vice-principals from being in the same bargaining unit as teachers.*

Bill 64 also speaks volumes in what it does not say. On matters of fundamental importance, such as the purpose of public education and the principles of equity, inclusion and justice, the legislation is silent. Rather than advancing public education in Manitoba with students in mind, the legislation focuses on control, compliance, and standardization in schools.

**Top concerns** are that Bill 64

- includes system-wide changes that lack evidence of their impact on improving educational outcomes - the stated intent of commissioning the education review. The status of principals and vice principals within the teacher bargaining unit is one such example. How does this improve student learning?
- eliminates principals and vice principals from the definition of teacher in the legislation. This removes them from the profession of teaching, narrowing their role to management and away from instructional leadership. This deprofessionalizes the principalship and will have consequences that are wide-reaching. Students are best served from a unified and collaborative profession.
- introduces mechanisms for parent influence over decision-making in areas best suited for the expertise of trained teachers and principal teachers, including, but not limited to, staff hiring and performance evaluations, recommendations regarding priorities and policies on discipline management and analysis of student achievement.
- increases standardized testing as well as publication and public comparison of test results at the school level. This will serve to widen existing systemic discrimination and inequities.
- authorizes the Provincial Education Authority Board, whose members are *appointed* by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, to implement policies about potentially sensitive curricular content, opening the door for regressive curriculum.
- obstructs free and fair collective bargaining. Under Bill 64, the new teacher employer - the provincial government - requires arbitrators to take into account the ability of the employer - also the provincial government - to pay. Arbitration is the only dispute resolution mechanism for teacher bargaining, and it must remain robust, effective and fair.
- eliminates all school divisions and creates regional catchments that may not be equipped to respond to local needs, based on their size. This centralized structure could increase bureaucracy and high-level administration rather than reduce it.
- creates uncertainty at a time when the COVID pandemic makes public services more important than ever.

While not all aspects of the BEST report appear in Bill-64, the government is not finished. Through the establishment of *regulations*, the education minister could implement change that does not require *legislation*. Clearly this is troubling.

We will do everything we can to keep you, our RETTA members, informed to the best of our ability. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us at the RETTA office.